U.S. Small Business Administration

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact SBA's FOIA Chief Oreoluwa Fashola at oreoluwa.fashola@sba.gov.

Content of Fiscal Year 2021 Chief FOIA Officer Reports

(High-Volume Agencies)

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Section I: Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

The guiding principle underlying DOJ's FOIA Guidelines is the presumption of openness.

Please answer the following questions in order to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied to all decisions involving the FOIA. You may also include any additional information that illustrates how your agency is working to apply the presumption of openness.

A. FOIA Leadership

1. The FOIA requires each agency to designate a Chief FOIA Officer who is a senior official at least at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level. Is your agency's Chief FOIA Officer at or above this level?

Yes

2. Please provide the name and title of your agency's Chief FOIA Officer.

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B. FOIA Training

3. Did your FOIA professionals or the personnel at your agency who have FOIA responsibilities attend any FOIA training or conference during the reporting period such as that provided by the Department of Justice?

Yes.

4. If yes, please provide a brief description of the type of training attended or conducted and the topics covered.

SBA FOIA internal training was provided to staff with FOIA responsibilities. Discussed handling of loan records in regards to exemption 4, customer service, and FOIA processing and records management in a remote environment.

5. Provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals and staff with FOIA responsibilities who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.

100%

6. OIP has directed agencies to "take steps to ensure that all of their FOIA professionals attend substantive FOIA training at least once throughout the year." If your response to the previous question is that less than 80% of your FOIA professionals attended training,

please explain your agency's plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals receive or attend substantive FOIA training during the next reporting year.

N/A

C. Outreach

7. Did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue, and, if applicable, any specific examples of how this dialogue has led to improvements in your agency's FOIA administration.

No.

D. Other Initiatives

8. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under the FOIA. The Department publicized FOIA-related performance standards for employees that have any role in administering the FOIA, including non-FOIA professionals. Please also indicate whether your agency has considered including FOIA-related performance standards in employee work plans for employees who have any role in administering the FOIA.

The FOIA Office in partnership with the Office of General Counsel provided training to SBA HQ and field staff in October 2020.

9. If there are any other initiatives undertaken by your agency to ensure that the presumption of openness is being applied, please describe them here.

No additional initiatives.

Section II: Steps Taken to Ensure that Your Agency Has an Effective System in Place for Responding to Requests

DOJ's FOIA Guidelines emphasize that "[a]pplication of the proper disclosure standard is only one part of ensuring transparency. Open government requires not just a presumption of disclosure, but also an effective system for responding to FOIA requests." It is essential that agencies effectively manage their FOIA program.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to ensure that the management of your FOIA program is effective and efficient. You should

also include any additional information that that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. For Fiscal Year 2020, what was the average number of days your agency reported for adjudicating requests for expedited processing? Please see Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report.

25.87 Days

2. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was above ten calendar days, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

Follow-up with OGC and program offices 5 days after assignment of request to ensure response to any request for expedited processing are timely met within 10 days.

3. During the reporting period, did your agency conduct a self-assessment of its FOIA program? If so, please describe the methods used, such as reviewing Annual Report data, using active workflows and track management, reviewing and updating processing procedures, etc.

Note: In September 2017, OIP released a FOIA Self-Assessment Toolkit as a resource for agencies conducting a self-assessment of their FOIA program. The Toolkit is available on OIP's website for all agencies to use.

Yes. The agency's full-time FOIA staff routinely conducts self-assessments of the program to determine timeliness and quality of the agency's responses. The FOIA team creates custom weekly management reports in the FOIAonline system to assess the timeliness of the agency's responses. More qualitative assessments are achieved by review of all SBA components' final responses. We continuously streamline processes related to intake and assignment, clarification of new requests, and FOIA fee assessment.

4. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Having SOPs can improve the consistency and quality of an agency's FOIA process. In addition, describing an agency's standard practices for handling FOIA requests on agency FOIA websites can help requesters better understand how their request will be handled.

a) Does your agency have SOPs that outline general processes for handling FOIA requests and appeals?

Yes

b) If not, does your agency have plans to create FOIA SOPs?

NA

c) If yes, how often are they reviewed/updated to account for changes in law, best practices, and technology?

As needed

d) In addition to having SOPs, does your agency post or otherwise describe your standard processes for handling requests on your website?

Yes

5. The FOIA Improvement Act requires additional notification to requesters about the services provided by the agency's FOIA Public Liaison. Please provide an estimate of the number of times requesters sought assistance from your agency's FOIA Public Liaison during FY 2020 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number).

Approximately – 600

6. Does your agency frequently receive common categories of first-party requests? If so, please describe the types of requests and if your agency has explored establishing alternative means of access to these records outside of the FOIA process?

Yes, Loss verification reports are handled directly by SBA loan centers

7. The FOIA Improvement Act required all agencies to update their FOIA regulations within 180 days. Has your agency updated its FOIA regulations in accordance with the FOIA Improvement Act? If not, what is your agency's plan to update your regulations?

Yes

8. Please explain how your agency worked to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on FOIA processing. Examples could include, but are not limited to: altering workflows, implementing new technology, providing notices and instructions or otherwise communicating directly with requesters.

Altered workflows and provided instructions to the program offices

9. Please describe the best practices used to ensure that your FOIA system operates efficiently and effectively and any challenges your agency faces in this area.

FOIA staff routinely check FOIAonline and report any issues to the helpdesk.

Section III: Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

The Department of Justice has long focused on the need for agencies to work proactively to post information online without waiting for individual requests to be received.

Please answer the following questions to describe the steps your agency has taken to increase the amount of material that is available on your agency websites. In addition to the questions below, you should also describe any additional steps taken by your agency to make and improve proactive disclosures of information.

1. Provide examples of material that your agency has proactively disclosed during the past reporting year, including links to the posted material

The Agency's most significant proactive disclosure postings are SBA's complete loan level 7(a) and 504 data sets and data dictionary from January 1, 1990, to present found here:

https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/sba-performance/open-government/foia/frequently-requested-records/sba-7a-504-loan-data-reports

These data sets represent the agency's most frequently requested information.

In addition, SBA has also posted data from the Paycheck Protection Program:

https://sba.box.com/s/5myd1nxutoq8wxecx2562baruz774si6

As well as decisions from the Office of Hearings and Appeals:

https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/oversight-advocacy/office-hearings-appeals/oha-decisions

2. Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useful to the public, especially to the community of individuals who regularly access your agency's website?

Yes.

3. If yes, please provide examples of such improvements.

The agency has changed the visual appearance of the SBA.gov website. Larger font, easy-to-read white space v. lettering format, improved quality and relevancy of the SBA program content posted are all noticeable improvements. These improvements are a result of

collaborative efforts by the Office of Communications and Public Liaison and the Office of the Chief Information Officer.

4. Please describe best practices used to improve proactive disclosures and any challenges your agency faces in this area.

The Agency has improved its Open Government and Open Data efforts to increase public access to the Agency's most frequently requested data sets. SBA has publicized its efforts through the Office of the Chief Information Officer's Open Government reporting to OMB, the OHA FOIA team's reporting to OIP, and the continued revitalization of the Agency's website.

Section IV: Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

A key component of FOIA administration is using technology to make information more accessible. In addition to using the internet to make proactive disclosures, agencies should also be exploring ways to utilize technology in responding to requests.

Please answer the following questions to describe how your agency is utilizing technology to improve its FOIA administration and the public's access to information. You should also include any additional information that that describes your agency's efforts in this area.

1. Is your agency leveraging technology to facilitate efficiency in conducting searches, including searches for emails? If so, please describe the type of technology used. If not, please explain why and please describe the typical search process used instead.

The majority of the agency's statistical data is posted online or is retrievable through electronic databases. Email searches are done by OCIO through the Microsoft Exchange Server and is coordinated by OGC.

FOIA professional staff and those with FOIA responsibilities now utilize Adobe Pro for review and redaction of records.

2. OIP issued guidance in 2017 encouraging agencies to regularly review their FOIA websites to ensure that they contain essential resources and are informative and user-friendly. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA website(s) during the reporting period to ensure it addresses the elements noted in the guidance?

Yes

3. Did your agency successfully post all four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2020?

Yes.

4. If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports, with information appearing on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2020.

SBA has upgraded to the Microsoft Office 365 Cloud and during the reconfiguration of its overall website some links were removed, and some information did not migrate to the new website. In the future better coordination with the OCIO will alleviate any issues.

5. The FOIA Improvement Act requires all agencies to post the raw statistical data used to compile their Annual FOIA Reports. Please provide the link to this posting for your agency's Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report.

https://www.sba.gov/document/report--foia-annual-report

https://www.sba.gov/document/report--foia-quarterly-report

6. Please describe the best practices used in greater utilizing technology and any challenges your agency faces in this area.

N/A

Section V: Steps Taken to Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests and Reducing Backlogs

The Department of Justice has emphasized the importance of improving timeliness in responding to requests. This section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report addresses both time limits and backlog reduction. Backlog reduction is measured both in terms of numbers of backlogged requests or appeals and by looking at whether agencies closed their ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations.

For the figures required in this Section, please use the numbers contained in the specified sections of your agency's 2020 Annual FOIA Report and, when applicable, your agency's 2019 Annual FOIA Report.

A. Simple Track

Section VII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "FOIA Requests – Response Time for All Processed Requests," includes figures that show your agency's average response times for processed requests. For agencies utilizing a multi-track system to

process requests, there is a category for "simple" requests, which are those requests that are placed in the agency's fastest (non-expedited) track, based on the low volume and/or simplicity of the records requested.

1. Does your agency utilize a separate track for simple requests? If your agency uses a multi-track system beyond simple, complex, and expedited to process requests, please describe the tracks you use and how they promote efficiency.

Yes, SBA only uses simple, complex and expedited multi-track system.

2. If your agency uses a separate track for simple requests, was the agency overall average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer in Fiscal Year 2020?

Yes, 20.2

3. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020 that were placed in your simple track.

80%

4. If your agency does not track simple requests separately, was the average number of days to process all non-expedited requests twenty working days or fewer?

N/A.

B. Backlogs

Section XII.A of your agency's Annual FOIA Report, entitled "Backlogs of FOIA Requests and Administrative Appeals" shows the numbers of any backlogged requests or appeals from the fiscal year. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2019 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

BACKLOGGED REQUESTS

5. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2020, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2019?

No.

6. If not, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2020 than it did during Fiscal Year 2019?

Yes.

7. If your agency's request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2020, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

SBA saw a 24% percent increase in received requests due to heightened scrutiny of the Agency's implementation of the PPP program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. If you had a request backlog please report the percentage of requests that make up the backlog out of the total number of requests received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with "N/A."

8%

BACKLOGGED APPEALS

9. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2020, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2019?

No, the backlog increased

10. If not, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2019 than it did during Fiscal Year 2020?

Yes

11. If your agency's appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2020, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

An increase in the number of incoming appeals.

A loss of staff.

An increase in the complexity of the requests received. If possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase.

Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible.

N/A

12. If you had an appeal backlog please report the percentage of appeals that make up the backlog out of the total number of appeals received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2020. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2020 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

26%

C. Backlog Reduction Plans

13. In the 2020 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2019 was asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did your agency implement a backlog reduction plan last year? If so, describe your agency's efforts in implementing this plan and note if your agency was able to achieve backlog reduction in Fiscal Year 2020?

N/A

14. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2020, please explain your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2021?

N/A

D. Status of Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations

Section VII. E, entitled "Pending Requests – Ten Oldest Pending Requests, "Section VI.C. (5), entitled "Ten Oldest Pending Administrative Appeals," and Section XII.C., entitled "Consultations on FOIA Requests – Ten Oldest Consultations Received from Other Agencies and Pending at Your Agency," show the ten oldest pending requests, appeals, and consultations. You should refer to these numbers from your Annual FOIA Reports for both Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020 when completing this section of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

15. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest requests that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes

16. If no, please provide the number of these requests your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.E of your Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

N/A

17. Beyond work on the ten oldest requests, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending requests.

N/A

TEN OLDEST APPEALS

18. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes.

19. If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2017 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

SBA closed 2 of 2 ten oldest appeals from FY19

20. Beyond work on the ten oldest appeals, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending appeals.

SBA did not have any pending appeals from 2019.

TEN OLDEST CONSULTATIONS

21. In Fiscal Year 2020, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in your Fiscal Year 2019 Annual FOIA Report?

SBA had 1 consult pending from 2019.

22. If no, please provide the number of these consultations your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2020 Annual FOIA Report. If you had fewer than ten total oldest consultations to close, please indicate that.

SBA closed 1 of 1 pending consults from FY19.

E. Additional Information on Ten Oldest Requests, Appeals, and Consultations & Plans

23. Briefly explain any obstacles your agency faced in closing its ten oldest requests, appeals, and consultations from Fiscal Year 2019.

None

24. If your agency was unable to close any of its ten oldest requests because you were waiting to hear back from other agencies on consultations you sent, please provide the date the request was initially received by your agency, the date when your agency sent the consultation, and the date when you last contacted the agency where the consultation was pending.

N/A

F. Success Stories

Out of all the activities undertaken by your agency to increase transparency and improve FOIA administration, please briefly describe here at least one success story that you would like to highlight as emblematic of your agency's efforts. The success story can come from any one of the five key areas. As noted above, these agency success stories will be highlighted during Sunshine Week by OIP. To facilitate this process, all agencies should use bullets to describe their success story and limit their text to a half page. The success story is designed to be a quick summary of key achievements. A complete description of all your efforts will be contained in the body of your Chief FOIA Officer Report.

SBA had more full releases and more partial releases than in the previous FY.